

Working in the Time of COVID-19 Oral History Project
Labor Archives of Washington
University of Washington Libraries Special Collections

Jolene McCann
Teacher, Franklin High School
Building Representative (Steward), Seattle Education Association

Narrator: Jolene McCann

Interviewers: Conor Casey

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CONOR CASEY 00:00:17: Good morning. This is Conor Casey from the Working in the Time of COVID-19 Oral History Project for the Labor Archives of Washington at the University of Washington Libraries, Seattle. It's October 30 at 10:05am and I'm interviewing Jolene. Jolene, do you prefer your surname to be Swaney or McCann?

JOLENE MCCANN 00:00:39: I go by Jolene McCann.

CONOR 00:00:40: Okay. We're interviewing Jolene McCann this morning.

CONOR 00:00:45: Thank you very much for joining us today, Jolene. I was wondering if you might be able to say your name and spell it.

JOLENE 00:00:52: Yes. My name is Jolene McCann, J-O-L-E-N-E M-C-C-A-N-N.

CONOR 00:01:05: Thank you. I wanted to make sure that it's okay with you that we're recording this and that we might share the resulting interview this morning.

JOLENE 00:01:13: Yes.

CONOR 00:01:14: Thanks. And is English okay for the interview?

JOLENE 00:01:19: Yes.

CONOR 00:01:20: Okay.

CONOR 00:01:21: So I wanted to first of all ask—if you're comfortable— Ask how old you are, what your birth date is and where you were born?

JOLENE 00:01:34: Yeah. I am 38 years old. I was born on December 12, 1981 in Youngstown, Ohio.

CONOR 00:01:42: Oh! A steel town! Nice!

JOLENE 00:01:44: Yeah!

CONOR 00:01:45: Yeah. What gender, if any, do you prefer to identify with? And what are your pronouns?

JOLENE 00:01:51: My pronouns are she and her and I identify as a woman.

CONOR 00:01:55: Okay, thanks.

CONOR 00:01:56: And in terms of race, or ethnicity? How do you identify and how important is your racial or ethnic background to you?

JOLENE 00:02:04: I identify as a white person. I think it's really important for white people to own their identity and start to unpack how white supremacy and things that we take for granted, are part of like who they are and how they engage with the world. So as far as—identity is important so I can disrupt some of these systems that are existing.

CONOR 00:02:24: Thank you.

CONOR 00:02:26: Yeah. And I thank you for acknowledging that and part of the reason why we're asking these questions that are almost presumptive is we're trying to make sure that we're not

normalizing that, and we're trying to name it. And also, sometimes people look for interviews for demographic aspects of it. So this next question will kind of unpack some of that. I was wondering if you could talk about what social political, ethnic, racial or religious communities you regularly are in contact with?

JOLENE 00:02:54: Yeah, so I was raised Catholic, but I'm a Unitarian now. So when I do seek church and actual fellowship in real life, it's at either of the Unitarian churches here in Seattle. And I've always been involved in organized labor movements wherever I am, whether it's at grad school, or it's as a teacher, so certainly my work with the SEA [Seattle Education Association] is important to me and just being engaged with larger labor issues as they're unfolding is important to me. So I'm a proud Franklin High School Activities Coordinator and teacher and I've taught in Seattle for 15 years. So a lot of the educators who are organizing around labor issues and, right now, trying to make Ethnic Studies happen, and opening up our own school at Franklin to working with these amazing professionals to make that happen. So I guess those are the communities that I'm invested in right now, and historically.

CONOR 00:03:57: Thank you. So you're a member of—you mentioned SEA, so Seattle Education Association, is that right?

JOLENE 00:04:05: Yeah.

CONOR 00:04:05: How long have you been a member of the union and what offices have you served?

JOLENE 00:04:10: I think the—one of the most important parts of labor is that you have a strong site-based organizational model. And I have been a building rep at Franklin High School for a lot of my tenure there. So I bounced from being a rep to an alternate. I grew up in the labor movement, and I really enjoy connecting with other teachers and other people who are active in that community, and serving my peers and my fellow members in that capacity. So I'm usually building rep and we do building level stuff. This summer, the Union had a Community Action Team that I did a little bit of work with, talking about how we engage the community with some of these common struggles. I'm really excited to see SEA moving more in that direction of engaging in the community and seeing how a lot of the struggles we're dealing with as teachers are, you know, systemic.

CONOR 00:05:02: Is being a Building Rep akin to being like a shop steward in another locale?

JOLENE 00:05:07: Yes.

CONOR 00:05:07: Okay. And I wonder— Oh, sorry.!

JOLENE 00:05:10: I was just gonna say we provide support to members if they're in some kind of conflict, but we also connect with our members and try to represent them and their concerns to the larger SEA body.

CONOR 00:05:26: You mentioned how you come from a labor background. That sounds interesting. I was wondering if you could talk about your background there?

JOLENE 00:05:34: Yeah. So my grandfather was a very proud Teamster and my grandmother was a member of the United Auto Workers; spent her life working at Lordstown, just outside of Youngstown. We're hearing a lot about Lordstown in this election. I'm trying not to get emotional here; my grandfather passed recently. So I just grew up by—being raised by people who came to the labor movement when they were young, in the [19]30s and [19]40s and had lived through this kind of “golden age of regulated capitalism,” that had produced an outcome that they saw, you know, in decline. And I always was able to talk with them about political issues and I—as a child, when there were strikes, or there were work actions, my family talked about this. We would get together after church on Sundays, we'd always be together on Sunday, sit around a big table and talk politics. And the idea was that you might be nine, but somebody wants to know what you thought and you should have some thoughts and be thinking critically about things. So, I guess in that way, I was kind of raised in the labor movement, and in a very political family.

CONOR 00:06:45: And you mentioned that—Am I correct in remembering that you said that you were here for—taught for 15 years? In your current job? Did you move to Seattle then? Or when did you come out here?

JOLENE 00:06:55: So at the end of— I went to Kent State University, and I am a very proud Golden Flash. I graduated from there and— President Trump—It's funny for me now to think about President Trump because I can remember being so upset by George W. Bush that we expatriated and left to go to Canada. And, now, you long for a war criminal, because it's a whole other world we're in. So, I attended graduate school at the University of British Columbia. I have a history degree from UBC, and my husband and I lived there. Immigrating to another country is a challenge, and my husband ended up getting a job here in Seattle. So we- He was-- My husband grew up in California, we met at university, but we felt like Seattle was as close as we could get to Vancouver without actually being in Vancouver. So here we are!

CONOR 00:07:46: *(laughing)* Poised to go across the border, if it's necessary!

JOLENE 00:07:49: *(laughs)* We're very close, right? I have my master's, I'll be like, “I'm coming back for the PhD, you know?” *(laughs)*

CONOR 00:07:55: (*laughing*) Well, I find that sometimes to get a sense of people's work, especially before the pandemic, because we've been so disrupted—I wondered if you could walk me through a typical day of your work before the pandemic, from the time you woke up to the time you went to bed?

JOLENE 00:08:13: Yeah. Okay. So, I have this amazing job, because half of my job is being an activities coordinator, and advising student government and working with all of our student leaders. And I'm obviously partial to Franklin High School, but it is one of the most diverse high schools in the city. So, you have this opportunity to work with an extraordinary group of young people. And the school itself has this history of political activism and engagement. That's a part of the culture. So I think that's what attracts a lot of us who work at Franklin and work so hard at Franklin to continue doing that. My average day before the pandemic was waking up at like six o'clock in the morning, doing stuff around my house, getting my son who's nine ready to go, being with my husband, all that stuff. And then we would go and I walk and I drop my son off at Kimball. I live on North Beacon Hill and I go on, walk down to Franklin, or when it's raining my husband would drop us off. But I get to school and kind of hit the ground running at school. And I love being activities coordinator. You get to engage with kids, and they come to you with all kinds of amazing and crazy and sometimes stressful situations. But it's very active, you don't know what's going to happen and what's going on with them. But I love planning and coordinating with them and working with teenagers and just helping them understand the framework so they can use their own agency to organize and make things happen and seeing that come to life is a big deal. So half of my day is spent working to help make those activities happen and working with the students to build that. And the other half of my day, I am teaching Advanced Placement Human Geography. And our goal is to create global citizens so I have a great time there. So it's a mixture of teaching, but then planning activities, working with student leaders, kids in clubs and stuff that—they're trying to organize all their projects. And, like a lot of teachers, school might end at—officially at 4:10—contract hours end— But most of us just keep on working. (*laughs*) So typically, I would have been there in the afternoon, connecting with my colleagues, connecting with students, grading until I would go and pick up my own kiddo and come home, and dinner, kinda just collapse in the bed, right? We go hard, teachers. I do. So, yeah.

CONOR 00:10:29: My father's an elementary school teacher. So I saw the other side of that, and I really appreciate your sharing that scope. Thank you.

JOLENE 00:10:37: Yeah.

CONOR 00:10:40: I was wondering if you could talk about the specific ways in which-- First of all, I wanted to double check that you are designated a frontline or essential worker by the Washington Governor's "Stay Home, Stay Healthy Order"? Were you—for teachers?

JOLENE 00:10:55: I don't think that teachers were. I don't know that teachers were, but there was this issue about when teachers would come back—what was happening with schools. You know, teachers—

we are essential, but our work can also be done virtually, which we're doing right now. So, I can't recall the exact—when the Governor designated that or not, but I do think that-- I mean, I think it's an interesting term to have for anybody for being an essential worker. And sometimes it would seem that it's a euphemism for being expendable, and that's curious, too. But--

CONOR 00:11:37: Can you talk about the ways in which your work was disrupted or has been disrupted by the pandemic?

JOLENE 00:11:43: Oh, yes. I mean, we work with students who are oftentimes under extraordinary stressors already. And when we-- I've never been more passionate about our city investing in city wide broadband internet until this happened, and you realized— It should not, I believe, had taken a pandemic for a city like Seattle to make sure its students all had laptops, or had connections to internet or internet activity! As teachers, we're doing stuff and, a lot of times, teachers are making a lot of assumptions about what children have access to at home. So this, in some ways, it was a positive disruption to bring attention to this problem that had always existed, but was seemingly insurmountable. And we threw everything we had at it and I wish we had done that sooner! So figuring out how to get everybody their tech, figuring out how to get people internet, to get their hotspots. In particular, with activities, you're looking at a group of children last year who were like: "I'm sorry, you're not having a prom. I'm sorry, we're not having a graduation."

And there was a grieving process with that, that I think all the activities coordinators in Seattle, there's 10 of us—you're really working hard with these kids and (sighs), you know, that that was happening. So I think sometimes we need to take time to pause and look at our mental health and how we're experiencing things and what's going on. And what I like seeing is that, increasingly, teachers are being able to build more time into building these relationships with students. So, in some ways, the pandemic disrupted this kind of rigid grind culture of doing all this stuff, and has allowed some time for us to authentically engage with kids, and connect with them on this level. So, the disruptions have been problematic, but I think they also present us with a lot of opportunities.

CONOR 00:13:39: You were mentioning some of the aspects of the way in which a technology gap can recreate some of the inequities of society. Do you know of some of the strategies that your students have used to try to get access to Wi Fi or the technology that they need to attend their classes, and what some of the stories that you've heard were?

JOLENE 00:13:59: Yeah, we have an incredible group of my colleagues who are working with students and are doing home visits and connecting with them. So students connect with us, let us know they need a hotspot, or they need help. We had students last year where they needed help paying the bill for their internet. And some of them—we were able to use funds that the school has—not public funds, but like McKinney Vento funds and funds for students who are experiencing homelessness or other things to connect with these students to help them get what they needed. Even now, one of my students the other

day—the entire year, he pops in and out of Human Geography. I'm always letting him back in and he's always apologizing. And then the other day, he had a new modem, and he could be with us like the whole time and it was there. And that's fantastic! It's November, but I'm glad it happened. So figuring out how to get those resources from the District and to the kids and I think making it a big priority. So we have some individual success stories at our school and connecting, but there's always the resource issue around funding for doing this. So that remains a challenge.

CONOR 00:15:07: Has the district been able to re-delegate resources or extract resources and what have they done to try to meet the needs of the students?

JOLENE 00:15:17: The District has set up tech centers across the city, so students can go and get tech support and their families can get help as they need. I've been able to communicate with students that-- Like, if their laptop's not working right, there's other issues, they're able to go have that addressed and solved. At my own child's school, at Kimball, I think the PTSA donated a bunch of money and all the children were given headsets. I think the District was trying to do that and make that happen across the district. But mentioning the PTSA is—you're always having— The schools are chronically underfunded and then you have this other funding gap between how much some schools can raise with their PTSAs or their boosters versus other schools. So I think that we're trying to use all of our resources at a District level to get kids what they need. I know at our building, our tech guru, he's awesome and he's always connecting with kids Our librarian meets, gets kids new laptops. So the resources are there, and it's just about trying to connect everybody, and sometimes we have to go to them because it's hard for them to get to us. So sometimes people are doing home visits. I think more home visits are happening than has ever happened, and I think that's a wonderful thing.

CONOR 00:16:25: Wow, they're even doing house calls! That's amazing!

JOLENE 00:16:30: Mmhmm. Yeah.

CONOR 00:16:32: Can you describe the ways in which you might have felt in danger? Or did you feel in danger, in terms of your health being threatened on the job, as a result of the pandemic?

JOLENE 00:16:41: Yes. So I became very ill with-- I'm not sure that it was COVID, but I have never been so sick. I missed a week of school. In part it was because I had a fever I couldn't get rid of. So you're really not supposed to be going back to school. I couldn't get tested at the time, and this was like the week before they shut down the schools. (clears throat) About a week or so before that, I had gone to Disneyland. So I just remember being upset and talking to consulting nurses who kept asking me if I've been into China, and I'm like, "I was just at Disneyland, and the whole world was there. And we were all breathing on each other and touching everything!" So I personally became ill in a way that I had never—I've never been that sick before. It was actually a turning point in my life to re-examine balance and my own health and wellness and making sure that I'm focusing on my wellness. What I felt after that was

uncertainty. I felt like I felt I had to go back to work, I went back to work until they shut down schools, and I still think like, "Did I have COVID, and I was like a 'super spreader'? Like with my kids, or things like this? Did I give this to students that they could take home to elderly?" A lot of our kids live in multi- generational homes. So there is this physical where you're like, "I could get sick, and I could die or I could be impacted." And then there's this huge psychological weight of that "not knowing" that was there like without having access to testing or the contact-tracing and things like that. It just— I remember feeling personally unsure. I remember colleagues writing me and telling me, "I'm trying to get a COVID test." and me thinking, "Oh my god, I think I gave this— I did this to them." So, our principal had been exposed, and they were like—at that time when there were certain schools that they were acknowledging like, "Oh, this is happening."

And the District was doing its best: Nobody knew what to do. But yeah-- So I mean, it was scary. You know that— I'm a teacher and I will tell you kids come to school sick all the time, especially teenagers! They will just load up on some Tylenol and come to school because they didn't want to miss AP Calc and because they didn't want to miss-- Or maybe it's just easier to be at school right now than at home. But kids come to school sick and teachers know that! And you know who else comes to school sick all the time? Teachers! So like this is-- This whole thing— I felt like it really daylighted a lot of larger issues which is that when we're not well, we should get well and stay home not not go back in, but we all do it.

CONOR 00:19:18: That's a really good point like this is this is a kind of an exercise of some of the stress points in society.

JOLENE 00:19:24: Mmhmm.

CONOR 00:19:25: Could you talk about your experience in relation to public health in the health care system and its impact on your students, and your fellow workers, and yourself in this moment?

JOLENE 00:19:40: I feel grateful that we live in Seattle. You know, I'm a Social Studies teacher and seeing how this is playing out in other regions, in places, especially with people I love, where I'm like, "That seems dangerous." I am happy we live in a city where we are taking our public health seriously, where we are trusting in science, and we are getting together thoughtful groups of people to make decisions locally, even if it's not happening nationally, that would help keep us all safe. I do feel like the city and the District— People are doing everything they can and it's hard, though, to make up for the loss of a national response to what's happening. But I am grateful. I'm always grateful. I don't know if you have left the city, like if you— I drove in the summer out to Eastern Washington. And everybody's, like, laughing because I had a mask on! And all I could think was, "I could be giving you COVID and killing you. But that's okay. You can laugh at me." So, it's totally different cultures. We live in a big bubble in Seattle, but I'm loving the bubble. I feel safe in it right now because where I go people are

wearing masks, they're socially distancing themselves, and they seem to be caring about the larger community, not just themselves

CONOR 00:20:53: Did the district or your school ever provide personal protective equipment, or how did you all obtain it—you and your colleagues?

JOLENE 00:21:01: I believe our building— At one point, before we were totally virtual, the buildings, I believe, invested in tons of hand sanitizer. Remember at the beginning it was all about the hand sanitizer and the disinfecting wipes? And that's what we were all doing. We should have all had the masks from the beginning. But hindsight is 20/20. So I remember at the time not everybody was wearing masks, but I had one colleague—I remember being very worried about this—was coming to school in a mask, and a lot of our students were wearing masks! And a lot of our students are second generation immigrants from other places that have handled this outbreak better than we have, and they didn't need the government to say “put a mask on.” Like mom was like, “Put a mask on!” Like, “That's what you need to do!”

So no, we weren't provided with masks or things like that, but they sent us home to be virtual, so that is something that the union is in negotiation with the District about—like, as we get a vaccine and as we get a handle on this, and we come back, what does that look like? And it does need to look like providing personal protective wear for staff, and for students who don't always have the resources to get what they need, either.

CONOR 00:22:13: Right. That's a really good point. So can you talk about what you know about the union serving in an advocacy role? Also, Renee might have alluded to an MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] between the Union and the District.

JOLENE 00:22:26: Yeah, so the District and the union are engaged in “impact bargaining,” where you're bargaining in between your actual bargaining sessions, and it's about a specific issue. So these are about how we should handle when and how we come back to school. So the union is working with representatives from the District, and they are collectively bargaining that. And I think both are looking towards public health information, and information from awesome scientists at UW [University of Washington] and other places about how to proceed, and what to do. I'm glad that people are working together on this. In a time where things seem so divisive, it feels like people need to come together for the common good, and figure out how to keep us all safe and maximize our ability to engage with each other to the greatest potential, but to do it safely.

CONOR 00:23:18: Can you talk about the way in which the union or the District has seemed to employ science? Because you mentioned that you felt like we're lucky to be in the bubble?

JOLENE 00:23:26: I do!

CONOR 00:23:27: Yeah.

JOLENE 00:23:28: I just think—just having your mayor, having your superintendent, having people be like, "Yes! Wear a mask! Socially distance! Wash your hands!"

I know that it's it's been very hard for people to have this pause and to be locked down like this, but I also see in Seattle, and around the country—Americans, we're resourceful people, and we're adaptive and I'm watching people care about each other and provide mutual aid in a way that I find heartening. You can't always rely on the government to come help you, and so having— Whether it's your church community, or your union community or your school community, I think we're seeing that more and more—we need to help each other like it's this interwoven web of people that need to work together and collaborate. So I'm happy that people listen to public health guidelines, that our political officials aren't challenging that or downplaying it. So yeah: I feel safe, and I feel hopeful about us getting a handle on this sooner than later.

CONOR 00:24:39: How long were you still teaching onsite after it became clear that there was a pandemic?

JOLENE 00:24:45: So I feel like it happened pretty quickly. I had to—have to go back and it was like in March. That's when things really started escalating. At Franklin, in particular, there was a day where we had heard that our principal had been exposed to COVID. And there was potential COVID in the building, and the school had-- The School District had sent people to like use like the defoggers to clean stuff. I mean, this is crazy to talk about because we know so much more right now in October than we knew in March! In March, everybody was just really fearful. And now we're like, "Yeah: There was a reason to be fearful like that."

What happened at Franklin is that there were two independent groundswells: One was the students who had heard, "Hey! Our school had been exposed to this," and I think it was also Aki. They had closed down Aki [Aki Kurose Middle School]. So the students were like, "Our little siblings go to Aki! We've all been exposed! How does this work? I don't know if this is safe!"

So the students are over here coordinating a day of action where they were walking out of class, and meanwhile, the teachers, when we had heard this at--- And it wasn't just at Franklin, it was across the District. A lot of teachers called in sick because it was just terrifying to go in there. I personally called in sick, because I'd been out the week before with what I think was probably COVID and, on Tuesday night, I was like, "I have a fever again! How is that possible?" So I personally was like, "We need to take-- I don't know what is going on with me. But I am--" I felt horrible. Like, "I could be, you know, spreading this and what do you do?" And, most teachers—they're recommending a 14 day quarantine? Teachers can't take 14 days off! If they even have those many sick days. (*laughs*) Fourteen days is a long

time. So I felt like a lot of teachers really responded with saying, "No, this isn't-- I can't come in. I can't be exposed to this. So you saw when, at first, the approach was going to be we might shut down individual schools versus the whole system. You saw teachers starting to get freaked out and really prioritize their own health and be like, "I can't risk that."

CONOR 00:27:00: You mentioned that you got sick and some people got sick. So they called in sick as a precaution, supporting their own health. But there's also an organizing tactic called a "sick out." And I wonder if you could talk about the distinction between who is calling out as sort of a "wildcat" union action, versus a personal precaution, versus people being concerned just about the pandemic?

JOLENE 00:27:27: I think it started out as an organic groundswell of concern, and it built into individuals, like you're saying, taking on action. It was not designated by the SEA. I'll say the SEA was supportive and said, "You took a sick day. This is quite the time to take a sick day, right? When this is happening!"

And then the SEA began advocating for us and communicating with the District about that. You can go back and read news articles from the time and the District, when they decided to close the schools, cited an issue is that they wouldn't have enough substitutes to adequately fill these absences that were across the District. And I think, especially older colleagues—we didn't know anything. People were just like, "I am not-- I can't die at work."

We have a lot of people who are in vulnerable populations. Like I said, older teachers, and also the problem, too, is that most substitutes are retired teachers. So the part of why you have a substitute shortage is that our elder substitute teachers are like: "Not trying to die getting my per diem today! Nope!"

So that's— In Arizona, the teachers say they don't want to be "dead for ed." And that sounds simple. But, yes, it's in our interest to stay alive! So I think you saw teachers engaging with their union more than they had previously because sometimes the teachers don't have a really strong opinion about what—about bargaining. Most teachers aren't sitting around discussing bargaining theory and things like that, but became very clear that a lot of teachers were very concerned about their health and the health of our students, and what was going on, and were willing to take action. A lot of people were emailing the School District and the union and petitions were going around. So I think it's a natural response to the situation we were in.

CONOR 00:29:26: Well, you made the pun "dead for ed." And it reminds me of the credo "red for ed" that a lot of the educators from the National Education Association talked about. In 2018-2019, we saw this kind of unprecedented wave of unsanctioned strikes and teacher walkouts and actions. I know SEA has always been very active, but can you talk about, from your perspective, how that interacted with the pandemic and how mobilized everybody was?

JOLENE 00:29:57: I feel like our union itself is shifting in leadership. And whenever you're having shifting leadership during very bizarre, unsettling times, that's what's going to be happening. But there is this movement I like to see towards greater community engagement and trying to connect with our students and their families. My working conditions are my students' learning conditions. So these are intimately intertwined. And, in the same way that it matters that I shouldn't have 42 kids in a class, it matters to the children. They should not have 41 other children they're trying to work with, that's not great. And we need to have safety protocols that will keep all of us safe. I mean, it's just so many of the issues we talk about are things that I think young people and families care about, too. And my child goes to Seattle Public Schools, so I'm an active parent in the District, and I'm also a teacher, and union rep. Our union is not like a radical union. Some other cities have— Like, you'll see Chicago in the news a lot, Philadelphia, LA. But I do believe that some of the more moderate— I do believe there's been this openness, since this has happened, to listen to some of the more progressive members of our union and willing to engage in this way with the community. So I hope we continue along that path as a union.

CONOR 00:31:29: You mentioned the practice of using hand sanitizer at first, which is when we kind of knew what was going on, and a few people wore masks, but it wasn't broad based, really. And that the District sent in, or maybe it was a building basis, a fogger. Can you talk about how when you were still on site, how your practices changed around sanitation, or washing hands or what people were trying to do?

JOLENE 00:31:50: *(laughs)* I look back and I'm like, "I really should have had a mask on! I needed a mask!" But that was just not—it's insane to me. But what I was doing was wiping tables down every day in a way that— I normally wipe down the tables with a TA maybe once a week. Our custodians also are overworked and have too much to do. So this cleaning stuff that needs to happen—they barely have enough time to go do all the other stuff. So cleaning up rooms like that, really explicitly with children— almost like their mom, like I would with my child like, "Chickenwing it when you sneeze!" "Wash your hands!" Like reminders, "Wash your hands!" It's almost silly to look back on now, what we were doing, because we did not understand how it was airborne and spreading to people! So I've got kids and table groups working, breathing all on each other, but the tables—I wiped them off! The tables were wiped off, but, you know, we didn't know. So I think it looks like— It also looks like a lot of teachers spending their own money on resources and you would have to go all over to get the resources! So you're spending your own money and your own time trying to get these disinfecting wipes. And then you're cleaning up your classroom—you're still doing everything else you were doing as a teacher, but now you're going to clean up the classroom and do that, too. So that's not great. So we want to have a system where teachers have this supplied, and then I would also argue we need to deal with larger, bigger issues, like fixing the schools so our ventilation systems are actually working properly. I mean, that needs to be a national movement of schools that are in structural collapse across the country, making sure our custodians can get paid to do this extra work. And it might look like having to hire other people to get them on board to work and do that. But there are some, some big things we need to consider as we go

back to school and they require large investments. So I am—I know how I'm voting next Tuesday! And I have felt most hopeful when I hear Joe Biden's plan for what this would look like because I think he's the one realizing that this is a huge problem and solving it's going to require an investment, and an ability for us to work together instead of always being divided up, because the countries who are handling this really well are working on it collaboratively, they're addressing it seriously, and they are investing resources in tackling it. So hopefully we can move towards that on a national level.

CONOR 00:34:26: Well, we kind of distinguished between the more organic response to some of the teachers that were doing the "sick out" before the district closed down. And you talked a bit about the MOU. I'm curious about, when you were still teaching on site, if you know of any actions or things that the union was trying to do while you were still in place. And the timeline of when the timeline of the MOU started getting negotiated. Is that like more for going back or is that at the time?

JOLENE 00:34:55: It's more for going back and figuring out what was going on. So they weren't really in conversations with one another. I think everybody was trying to wrap their head around what was going on. I think that you saw teachers who were really close to it. And, like I said, we are very—every— People come sick all the time to school: the kids, us, everyone. We know this. And so, people started, to varying degrees, getting concerned about it and talking to one another about it and raising these red flags with one another. And you had a lot of teachers, out of a sense of desperation or self preservation, be like, "This—I don't know that I can go in!" Especially if your building— Like I said, at the time, if you knew, "Oh, there was a confirmed case!"

We look back now and, probably, there were confirmed cases, all over, right? I haven't really thought about a lot of this, Conor, since it happened. And now— When I don't teach geography, I teach history, so it's really— You got a whole other set of information so when you're looking back, you're like, "Well, we didn't know." But I think that teachers started to— You have to lean on each other for support and figuring out things and it was disruptive. I think people started to engage with our union. We did have good turnout for the voter—for the elections within the union and people engaging more with that, more people interested in running for leadership. So I think maybe people felt powerless and decided, you know, "Hey, this is a way that I could have some power, I can have some influence, or I can have some information, or at least have someone to talk to because it's crazy!"

So I'm always grateful for my union brothers and sisters that I get to work with and be with, and I'm glad we have each other.

CONOR 00:36:52: You know, it's interesting—you're a history person, you're a history teacher, and now you're generating a primary source. What do you think that people should really know or take away from that particular time?

JOLENE 00:37:03: I think that— (pauses) I love that you're doing this. I love as a historian to make sure that we're hearing everyday working people's version of what was going on, and what was happening. What I would like people to take away is that, at least in our city, when this happened, we all came together. That once we acknowledged this was happening, we closed down the schools. I mean, yes, there's growing pains. Yes, there's bumps along the road that I felt a sense of solidarity in our city that made me very proud to be a Seattlite. Were there missteps and other issues? Yes. But I hope what people takeaway is that when you can work together as a community, to trust information, and to look out for each other, you can help keep each other safe. I feel like sometimes in America—we're always trying to figure out that balancing act between individualism and collectivism. And we're taught to fear collectivism, but it's these very collective values that are helping preserve people and helping to make it safe so that you can move about and leave your house and not be on lockdown. So I'm happy to live in a place where I felt like people were willing to consider everyone else around them, too. Not just themselves. And I would— With students, I think they take that for granted. If you only know Seattle, you might think this is how it was other places— But then you had to go on Facebook, or other places, and you could go see that's not always how it was. So I guess what I would take away is that as we go into the future, we can't afford this fierce individualism that borders on sociopathy. We have to work collectively because climate change is real! Pandemics are real! We should be happy this isn't Ebola! Like I— As a geography teacher, normally I just talk about the epidemiological transition model. Now we're living it. And we know another one could come. So let's just be prepared and proactive and understand that we have to work together collectively for our own individual safety. So I guess that's the takeaway: to understand that collective things aren't bad, and that they're necessary sometimes—collective responses to things in order to address them.

CONOR 00:39:21: Do you feel like that was an attitude you had before? Did it validate an existing attitude you had or do you feel like it kind of shifted being able to see that moment? Did it seem like it kind of--

JOLENE 00:39:33: Well, I always believe in the role of the collective— Noam Chomsky will talk about how the reason we atomize people down to one thing is because one person can't do anything, and the only thing that ever changes anything in history is movements of people working together collectively to do that. So I was subscribing to this notion for a long time. What I felt like was: I saw Seattle and I saw other cities, like: Yes, they were flattening the curve, they were working together. I saw regions pulling together to do that. Even— I grew up in Ohio! And I was so relieved! Their governor got so much crap, but he's a Republican and he'd be like, "No, you're not going out, put a mask on."

And when your family still lives out there, you're like, "Thank you!" I mean, it's shocking to see your high school friends really reacting to that. I'm like, "Do you want to die? I don't know!" But I am glad that, in a lot of regions, we figured out that we have to work together— So yeah, I guess I always believe in the power of the collective. I think the individual part's cool—you got to balance that, and that's you. But it's in everybody's own self-interest for us to be safe and doing stuff. And I think we're

coming away with some skewed ideas of liberty, and what it looks like. So I'd like us to embrace the kind of balance where we have personal liberty, but we also value other people and their safety.

CONOR 00:41:00: Well, that actually sets up the next question perfectly! I'm wondering whether you accessed any kind of government or community support when you were ill, or whether you participated in any kind of mutual aid?

JOLENE 00:41:13: So I-- I look back at how sick I was and I think to myself sometimes like, "Oh, this is probably--" This sounds morbid, but I'm like, "This is why some people might die!" Right? Like, if you— I didn't— I have paid sick leave. I never worried that I was going to lose my job! My bosses, in fact, called to see how I was doing. I work with a really strong professional learning community within my school at Franklin, and, when I told them what was going on, they made my lessons and gave them to my substitute teacher. So that kind of mutual aid as teachers was really, really powerful! I'm lucky and privileged that I have a partner who's here with me and could help take care of me. But I really did spend like four days just in a malaise that I had. So yes: I think it's really important to have your community. My neighbors were checking in on us, it's about making sure that you're connected to your community, but increasingly, in a world people are disconnected. And yeah, the government couldn't really help me. I mean, they-- The consulting nurses at Kaiser were amazing. They "talked me off the ledge" many times, but you couldn't get a COVID test, you couldn't do anything. And they were basically like, "We don't know what it is. But--" You know, "Do this, do that!"

And I would call and check in and— But I've—it was right at the beginning of this and, at the time, the only way you could get tests was if you had contact with somebody who had a documented case of it, or anybody who'd, like I said, come from China. So lots of tearful calls about me crying about Disneyland, and my possible and likely exposure there. But there was no other real help! I did a teleconference with a doctor. I mean, that's— I don't know. And then we did get the 1,200 bucks from the government, right, that my husband and I—we've donated and spent back on community projects and things—on mutual aid in that way. But I guess— No. Most of my—it wasn't really government support, it's about your own community engaging with you and supporting you. And I think that's part of that fraying fabric of America right now, right? People get isolated, and they're alone and you need a support system when you get that sick.

CONOR 00:43:35: So you mentioned that your principal had been exposed and that you knew a few people that may not have been able to be definitely ID'd at the beginning with being sick with COVID. Did you have any friends or family that got ill as well?

JOLENE 00:43:51: You know—we can look back. I should maybe go get one of those antibody tests, but I think because it was—I was sick so long ago, I'm not sure that—this happened in March. My own family— My son never showed any signs of anything. So when they talk about children being asymptomatic carriers, I think I lived that. Like: nothing! My husband was a little sick, but not not like I

was. So, as far as— Like, right now, one of my dearest friends and mentors has COVID. She told us yesterday: "I was diagnosed with COVID."

And you just don't know! I have this colleague, who I love, who's retired and I go, "Please, I hope you're okay," and that's wonderful. Then I have—one of my fellow union reps told me about her friend who's a teacher in Indiana. He's been doing hybrid teaching, 42, perfectly healthy. He had a heart attack this week! When he goes, they find out he is COVID positive, and they think it might have related to this heart attack. So there's just so many unknowns out there about what's what's happening with this, and I guess I'm just hell-bent on us turning towards science and understanding-- Working together with people all over, we have this opportunity to work with people from all around the world to help understand this and I hope that we're able to do that.

CONOR 00:45:15: Last spring you had to do— You all had to collectively do a rapid transition to online teaching and learning. I wonder if you could talk about what that was like, and what it was like for your students, and then reflect on what it's like now.

JOLENE 00:45:32: It feels more normal now and the District has a different grading policy. The District had, at the time, and the Union encouraged it too—that it was like all the students were basically going to get an "A," because you couldn't deal with all of the inequities.

JOLENE 00:45:47: [?Danny Weski?] wrote an article that I thought was interesting, where he basically said, The District is doing this as a bandaid for a lot of issues they should have been dealing with for a long time. Now everybody gets an "A," but the inequity's been there. We need to examine that. So now we have a policy whereby students who aren't doing anything would earn an incomplete, but it's like A's, B's, and C's, right. So, grading is currency; grading is also problematic. And I think is something else we could look at disrupting, but I think the kids— The kind of normalcy of that is helping, clear schedules, the District being able to roll out everybody getting those laptops and getting the tech stuff they actually need made a huge difference. The District itself, and a lot of buildings, focusing on having advisory classes, and explicitly teaching social-emotional learning stuff to help students with coping, I think is great. There was just so much fear and uncertainty last year. So it's become a more normalized experience for students, but every teacher that has relationships with their students is at times a therapist or the kids come to you with their issues or their concerns. So last year was a really hard time. It's still challenging, but we see kids that are just really depressed, really anxious, really unsure. And then, on top of that, having other like—physically: "I might lose my home, or am I gonna pay rent?"

And things like that. So I think as we all responded as a city, like, "Okay, we're not going to evict people, and we're gonna have these other support systems there, we're gonna campaign for this."

I think that helped all of us, but we're still—we're still dealing with that, like, we still have students who are experiencing mental health crises because these are crazy times to be in and it's hard to be isolated.

But I don't know—I feel like we're very adaptive as humans. So I feel like people are figuring it out and doing it, and I do appreciate both the District and in particular, my school, encouraging us to scale back like this kind of, "you've got to get from this point to this point in the curriculum", and instead saying, like, "you need to connect with the students with each other and build time in there so we can know each other and learn our content that way." That's one of those positive disruptions I was talking about.

CONOR 00:48:13: Has this impacted any of your students' food security? I know that lots of times lunch programs are really important for people who are impoverished.

JOLENE 00:48:21: Absolutely. Franklin's a site for lunch pickup. So it's great that people can go and I really— The District did do some cool stuff with school lunch. They hired a guy who started making more culturally diverse meals for people that were healthier and tastier. I love that the District was like "Come and get food on these days." Like even— a lot of families—if you're like, "We don't need it," but "come get it!"

And that's part of the community. And that's there. My students are working with some of us, as teachers, to create a little free pantry at Franklin so that people can come and get what they need. And it's about us engaging with our community and also prioritizing positions in schools that aren't just classroom teachers—that are people who can have these enormous impacts by being able to be the liaison between parents and teachers and help facilitate those home visits and those connections. So, I hope, going forward, we can see that kind of investment extend across the District because we want to have our families connected to our schools. And we have to be intentional about building that. And we, as we do now, we ask teachers to just do more and more and more. It's too much. We need more people and we need different community resources. We need, I would argue, allocate some of our resources going elsewhere into funding this kind of stuff. I was very proud this year when our union advocated for the police to be removed from Seattle Public Schools and advocated for the police union to not be a member of the King County Labor Council. I know these were controversial things, but we've been defunding education my entire life, and I think we need to look at how we're investing our money and what kind of impacts we're getting, and I'm seeing some real quality work happening. I'd like to see money going to these community organizations that are doing that, and my colleagues who are doing that, and I think every teacher you would talk to would want that. Our kids need this.

CONOR 00:50:24: Do you remember internal union meetings where that was debated? About trying to bring forward the proposal at the King County Labor Council about getting rid of the Police Officers Guild?

JOLENE 00:50:34: Yeah. And there's—I mean our union is full of people with diverse views, and things like that. And we've had some legendary virtual— One of the best things about this, for me, is actual virtual union meetings, instead of trying to run over there after school and like, I can make my own dinner, hang out and still be with my family, but participate. But we had some union meetings, and

they went like five hours long, because the RA [Representative Assembly] and other people were like, "We are taking action on this. And we're doing this."

So I just saw our union become more responsive to the actual members, which I love seeing. I am—I love to see that. So, that was happening, and you saw our RA begin to engage and take on some of these other issues.

CONOR 00:51:19: Were the more people able to attend because of the Zoom format?

JOLENE 00:51:22: Yes. Yeah. And then the other thing, we—the advisor clubs that go through things, and unions do too. So, sometimes, we have some epic chat activity, right? So now we're like, "Okay, sometimes the chat's distracting from this debate here."

But anytime I'm in a union meeting, and people are like, "I just want some democracy and transparency, and I want to engage and do that."

I think that's wonderful. So I think our Executive Board has really—and our leadership that we've elected, they're trying to reach out to people and find out where they are at and hear from them. But there are growing pains. I don't envy anybody—principals, Union presidents, superintendents, Governor. Being in a leadership position right now, it's tough stuff. It's tough all the time, but especially now.

CONOR 00:52:09: How did your teaching strategy change when you went to an online format?

JOLENE 00:52:13: Yeah— My teaching strategy is always around decentering myself, and really focusing on discourse. Kids talking, kids working in groups. I'm really into project-based learning where you're presenting students with authentic questions and authentic audiences to share their work. So I had to adapt it virtually. I will tell you: the District taking so long to make Microsoft Teams have breakout rooms really jammed us up for a minute, but we have it now. So I am just loving that and figuring it out. It takes longer to get to know kids. One of the things that is always surprising to me— I live in the neighborhood where I teach. My camera's always on so they know me and people I don't know will come and be like, "Hey, Miss McCann!" and talk to me. And I'm like, "Oh, you don't look like the ninth grade picture that I have of you. You're my student!" But so I mean it's— the way you build relationships is really different, and it's interesting sometimes that you have parents sometimes that will come on and be like, "Oh, I like talking about that!" Or: "I had a question about that map!" (*laughs*)

I feel like I'm engaging more with parents. I feel like I have more time and we're sending emails, and really— You know, sometimes in high school, we move away from that, but there's been a lot of positives. There's hard stuff, and I think we're all ready for a vaccine and be able to come back in person, and— Most teachers became teachers because we didn't want to sit in front of a computer, and we wanted to be around people, and that being around the people is what makes us feel good. So I think a

lot of teachers right now feel like you're doing the hard part of teaching, and you're missing out on all of the positive inputs and things! But we're finding ways to seek that out and build it virtually. And I joke that every teacher is a first year teacher this year. And if you look at the classic graph for teachers, it's like you're excited, you're anticipating stuff, and then right around like October, November, December, you're in a valley of despair, of disillusionment, and then you come back and you're like "I can do this!" And you work together and you do it. So, keeping that in mind, I'm glad to see us at my school, at least, really supporting each other and trying to figure it out as we go and sharing best practices as they evolve.

CONOR 00:54:32: Did you ever feel like you or your family were nervous about the economic impact of the pandemic or whether you felt like your housing might be threatened as a result of that?

JOLENE 00:54:42: No, I am extraordinarily privileged, in that my husband works in the tech sector and I bought my own home at the bottom of the market in 2013. So I will tell you, it is alarming to have people constantly call and try to— Because of where I live, they want to buy your home and come and build a— I don't know what else they want to build. So I see it in our neighborhood. I live in North Beacon Hill, and gentrification is this real thing. And we are experiencing, sometimes, the displacement of our students who are now increasingly in South King County, because you can't afford to live in Seattle, where we will often have students who are using a grandparent's address or someone, but they themselves live in Federal Way. So, right now, attendance is better than it's ever been, and I'm not surprised because when you just have to click instead of trying to get from Federal Way, all the way up to Central Seattle, your attendance is easier! So I worry a lot about my students with their housing. I was happy that there was the eviction moratorium, and things like that, but I personally was not impacted by that or worried about it, other than worrying about students and working with them.

CONOR 00:55:59: Well, you talked a little bit about how you've tried different modes and different formats for your work life and also some of your union activism. How about your social life? How has the pandemic changed your social life? And what strategies have you used to try to adapt?

JOLENE 00:56:16: Well, Conor, I'm an extrovert! So like, honestly, when those protests happened, and I could go out, I was like: "Whoo! I'm out here!" Right? And then like, with my mask on, I was like: "Oh, my God! I love people! I love a crowd of people! I love an assembly, I love a big basketball game with the gym packed!" It was risky, but I'm glad we went out and we all had those masks on, and we didn't get each other sick. So that's happening. I have this awesome group of women who I'm friends with, and we have a little "salon" that meets on Friday afternoons where we give each other little prompts and we talk about stuff— That's been sustaining. My sister lives near me and is wonderful. I'm glad I'm at home with my husband and my son. I feel really, really connected to my nine year old and it's so crazy to have him be learning fourth grade, like right here. So I feel really close with him. Not that there aren't days that are really stressful. But I am an extrovert. So I had to find ways to be extroverted. So I was having like Tiger King, Zoom salons at the beginning, and getting people together on Zoom trying to play

games. It's been nice out, so sometimes we just try to meet up with people and have a socially distant, maybe like hike or things like that. My little boy—his best friend comes over, he's like— It's not really a "pod", I guess, but they have a little bubble. So just trying to figure out the balance of keeping your own safety in mind. But I— Again, like I said, I really think that having a social network, having a network of people is what's really important all the time, but especially in times like these, so nurturing that and building that. Love my fellow union reps at Franklin! Robust text chain that we're always engaged in, talking about stuff. I'm calling people on the phone a lot like it's the 90s again! I've never talked to people on the phone like this, like since high school, when you call your friend after school and I'm like "Hey, I know we just left school, but let's talk about this!" I'm doing that. Yeah, my colleagues—I normally would walk over the room and talk to them, and now I just call them on Teams. I'm like: "This is like college with like, instant message, but I have a video here!" All sorts of ways. But yes, trying to maintain my social life has been very, very important to me. And I think key to my own mental health and happiness.

CONOR 00:58:38: You know, you brought up one thing too: Paid labor isn't the only type, and so you're now providing childcare directly, and I'm wondering if you could talk about that other unpaid work that you're doing, in terms of supporting your— Childcare and family and all that now that you have to do that, too?

JOLENE 00:58:58: I am. I'm really lucky in that my son is pretty self-directed, and, in some ways, virtual school is a little bit easier for him. He has ADHD. So now he just does what he needs to do, and I think sometimes the social stuff you get in trouble for-- He's pretty smart kid, he just moves ahead. Now he just reads books, does his little math activity. So he's figuring out, and I've been really impressed with his elementary school teachers and like he's right now down—getting ready for lunch bunch, to go sit with people. So I feel like I'm lucky in the sense that he's in fourth grade. He has some good structures and programs through Kimball so he can kind of be self-directed while I'm doing my work. I feel for my friends who have tiny little kids at home or a little—little four year old— That would be a lot. And then, also I have a wonderful husband who splits all the labor equally with me. But yeah, we're trying to figure it out. We're trying to manage it. I think it's overwhelming for a lot of parents and then—our families live in Ohio in California, so we don't— it's not like: "Oh, I wish we could see the grandparents. I really don't—" I haven't not been with my kid since March. That's okay. I'm embracing that, but sometimes— Yeah, you're seeing all these articles about women in particular, about like the lowest engagement, I think, [in] the labor force since the late 80s—women, and their pay all going down. And women are oftentimes in homes doing a bunch of actual labor, that has been gendered. I'm very lucky that I have a very extraordinarily progressive husband who loves to cook and we balance these things. But we also talked about a lot of those things. So sometimes, I think, as a society, we're not having that discussion. And I do feel like sometimes with teachers this— I don't know if you guys are familiar with this concept of "toxic positivity." It's a big thing in teacher world that teachers are talking about. And it's because we've built a system that's built on women martyring themselves in order to do it. I would argue being an excellent teacher is impossible, unless you want to put in 20% extra effort for free, or you're

very experienced and figured out how to work efficiently. So I think sometimes we're looking at a field that's dominated by women, especially elementary school teachers, and asking them to do more at school. In the same way, we asked women to do more everywhere else, and maybe not examining the underlying reasons why that's happening. And then it's even worse if you are an African-American woman or Latinx woman—like a BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] woman, because then you're being paid even less, dealing with structural racism. So I feel sometimes my students will get frustrated with their mom: "Oh, my mom!"

I'm like, "You don't say a word about your mother! You have no idea how hard it is to be a mom right now!" Like trying to figure all this stuff out and do that. It's normal for teenagers, I think, to kind of push away from their parents. But something I'm seeing, too, is I see kids really coming together with their families and feeling really nurtured by their families, and that's what you've got right now. And connecting in that way. So I see that happening in my own household, and I see that happening with some of my students who probably don't love it when their mom writes me to say, "Oh, so-and-so's talking about your class and we were talking about this. I love when kids—" "Me and my dad were listening to NPR!"

"That's awesome!" So trying to make lemons lemonade out of lemons.

CONOR 1:02:28: I wonder whether you could now walk me through a typical day, from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed now. I know that "typical day" is sort of a loaded question, but...

JOLENE 1:02:38: So we kind of set up our house so that, like, I'm in a little office where I have my stuff set up. And then there's an area over here where my son has his desk and does all that. So our morning routine really didn't change. It's just we don't go anywhere and we get dressed, we come upstairs. And we kind of log on here, go into Teams, you go check all that stuff out. I teach during the day. In the afternoon, I have my classes, I do my activity stuff in the morning—I have— Since this has happened, one of my work things that's been great is really working with all these other activities coordinators across the city in a way we never had before. Because we didn't have Teams and this virtual— Well, we did, but we weren't using it. So it's connecting with them. You go through doing the stuff you would normally do, but it does take more work. It feels like grading is even more challenging. A lot of times, you're making videos, or things, outside of stuff that you're like, "You're gonna watch this and do this." And the students-- We normally present our lessons, and then you have asynchronous time. In my experience, my students love to stay on during asynchronous time and work on stuff and ask questions or just connect, and talk and do that. So I think all of the things teachers were already doing are still in play, at least they are for me, but then there is like this added piece of trying to figure all this stuff out or you're learning, you're teaching yourself how to use Padlet or Flipgrid, and then you're figuring out— Like our kids, if everything was on their phone, it would be great. But when I'm like, "Hey, you're gonna cut and paste a picture!" And they're like, "What?"

So we're doing tech support, we're breaking it down, and we're helping them. So it's everything it always was, and a little bit more because (*sighs*), just because of the nature of the virtual work. I feel lucky that I work with a professional learning community so we can divide up work and synergize together. I feel like we produce more quality work and everything feels more manageable. But, you know, these are trying times, and I want to give a "shout out" to my buddy who teaches woodshop. Can you imagine teaching woodshop virtually? But what has he done? He has taught these children tree identification and how you use different kinds of woods to build things! And I'm talking to kids who are like "Oh yes," they're like, "Oh, I went on my walk report and I noticed this grove of maple trees."

I'm like, "Did you just say grove?"

"We learned that in woodshop!"

So I am watching some extraordinary teachers really really adapt. I'm lucky that geography—they love to look at a map and talk about it. So Teams is still a good venue for that. It's harder if you're a math teacher.

CONOR 1:05:21: You mentioned your involvement in a very significant civil rights moment that's emerged out of this pandemic, perhaps because of people's free time. But we're in the middle of this really significant reckoning, and I wonder whether you can talk about your observations and thoughts about the movement and how you were involved or impacted.

JOLENE 1:05:44: I think you're absolutely right. Like what you were seeing was a lot of people were at home, and they had time to press "pause" and really process what was happening. I remember—I've worked at Franklin for a long time and students have been—I remember when Trayvon Martin was murdered, that my students were out on the corner of MLK and Rainier Avenue protesting out there, demanding change, having spirit days where we were all wearing hoodies and and demanding change and action! So I think you see communities who've been aware of this, like this is an ongoing problem. But what happened with George Floyd was so obvious, so egregious, and all on film that I think it ignited a movement of other people who maybe weren't paying attention to this stuff, who now couldn't ignore it. And I also, frankly, even in our own city, if you're talking about the police and police violence and state violence— And the response of the police is to double down on it, even if you're not like a radical, you're like, "Did they just pepper spray a little kid?" Like, "What?"

So I had a lot of friends, who I wouldn't say are political who think I'm crazy and radical, who were really starting to question how we were investing our funds. I have a lot of people who I couldn't believe were supportive of us divesting from the police and looking at money in different ways. I think even questioning— Even us— So often you just go about your world you don't question, "How did the police get like this? How do we end up with this hyper militarized police force? How did we end up spending all this money on policing people instead of educating them and giving them health care?"

And I think the juxtaposition of seeing how we were investing in that versus how we weren't investing in health care, or in schools or other stuff— So there's this reckoning, it's almost like America—yeah, we slowed down enough! I feel like the average American's got to work real hard, all day long, just to survive. And to have some time and look at that, I think, led people to reflect and then really engage in actions.

CONOR 1:07:52: How was the union involved, If anything? What stance did they take in terms of BLM?

JOLENE 1:07:59: Oh totally supportive! And we went to marches. We went to the big one that—they ended up marching through Beacon Hill, where I live, and those pictures are extraordinary! Like 60,000 people walking through your neighborhood! And the SEA encourages you. If you've never been to a protest, you go, we tell you where we're at, we've got the banner, and you can go walk and meet and be with people to come out there and do that. I certainly went to many of the demonstrations with friends that I have, and we would bring, our "Teachers for Racial Justice" and all of this stuff. I think it's— Sometimes teachers are like, "I don't want to be political."

No, I don't understand that. Because your decision not to be political is political. Your decision not to have the discussion, to engage in it, to recognize it, is a political decision. So I think a lot of teachers really saw what was happening and we saw our students-- especially as high school students-- really engaging in what was going on. In particular, my own ASB [Associated Student Body] coordinated this insane community activity right on the corner of the intersection by our school and they had that whole intersection just filled with people all socially distanced, and then the kids marched down Rainier Avenue. Denise Juneau [Superintendent of Seattle Public Schools] came, the police came and maintained things like safety wise, closed off Rainier. I've never seen anything like that! Right now, all these young kids are voting, and that's really encouraging to me. So what I saw at the end of last year was just young people beginning to organize and, I think, an awakening in America that we we have political power, collectively together— That it might feel like your vote or you just screaming into the void on Facebook isn't doing anything, but we saw people acting together and then we saw real change manifest from it. So that's the power of movements. We saw it in real time.

CONOR 01:09:54: Back to the pandemic, how do you think everything is going to be different after this?

JOLENE 01:10:01: I hope that we will decide that we want to invest in public health and healthcare in the same way we invest in our military and things like that. That Americans will stop believing that it makes them crazy and socialists have health care. Like, that's just a crazy thing to me to even believe that! Having lived everywhere as an army brat, like growing up with socialized medicine, I'm like, "Oh, well, you're complaining about it. It was great!" So I hope that happens. I hope that we disrupt education

permanently, and that we do not go back to how we were doing things. I hope that we as a citizenry question working four days a week instead of five, right? Maybe we just need to work four days a week. Maybe we need to have more paid time, more vacation more— We, as Americans, and— In geography, I'm always comparing what's going on to other places, and it's sometimes really astounding to kids. They don't understand how hard we, as Americans, are always working compared to other cultures that value rest and taking care of yourself. So I hope that happens. And I hope that in Seattle, I was reading about Detroit, you've got 150th day of protests that were happening last week. I hope that we understand and we realize that it's through that sustained pressure through these movements that we might be able to address the systemic racism that plagues our country, and the growing inequality that is destabilizing it increasingly, and we're able to have those discussions. It's easy for politicians to just ignore the people who vote for them if we're not engaged, and we're not holding them accountable, and we're all working so hard and so exhausted, we barely have time to do that. But I hope that we decide to prioritize that and work together and demand change. I also hope that people can really start to embrace the reality around us around climate change, and about what it could look like to not have us driving in cars all the time and commuting. In geography, we always talk about how there's some people who are—like when you're talking about cultural ecology, I always love the possibilists. Because they believe in the future: that things are possible. That you could look at this, and you could make it better, you can figure it out. So I hope that we look around the world and we see what's working, and that we embrace that. We always seem to be reacting and resisting change, and we just can't afford to as a species. We have to acknowledge it's happening and adapt together. So I hope we do that.

CONOR 01:12:28: What surprised you the most about this [period] of time?

JOLENE 01:12:34: I'm gonna be honest. I am very aware of how polarized our body politic is in America, and I understand that, but I was not prepared for people to show up with guns and protests [after] being asked to wear masks and doing things like that. Maybe I should have been, but I'm amazed at the kind of willful ignorance I see on display in America that astounds me, and endangers me and other people. My husband and I— I'm the "foolish optimistic one", and he's the "misanthrope." Like, "People are idiots!"

I'm like, "No, people are good! They're good!"

But watching, throughout the pandemic, watching people put themselves at risk and not acknowledge actual science, and instead choose to listen to people on talk radio. That should not have surprised me, but the degree to where we went with that did.

CONOR 01:13:39: How about any positive experiences that have happened out of the pandemic?

JOLENE 01:13:45: I personally rebalanced my life. It took a pandemic for me to realize that I was leading this really unbalanced life, and I was working so hard, in a way that wasn't sustainable and is not

good for me as a person or my school because I need to be rested. So it really took that kind of serious disruption, for me to recalibrate, and create some healthy boundaries, and I have experienced a lot of personal gains from that. So, personally, I feel really good about that. In my efforts to build— I feel like a lot of my friendships really strengthened through this. Like I'm going to be an old lady with some of these women. And we'll be like, "Remember the quarantine and all that and how we were together?" I feel hopeful that we can embrace some of the changes in the things we're realizing about how we teach kids and we can build on that when we come back, and that this idea of centering the child and having relationships— That we keep that and we maintain that. I'm generally pretty hopeful, so I'm optimistic that we're going to figure this out, and that we're going to build on our successes and that there's nothing wrong with America that you can't fix with what's right about America.

CONOR 01:15:04: Do you have any other thoughts you'd like to share? What haven't I asked you that I should have asked you about?

JOLENE 01:15:09: I feel like you asked me a lot of stuff. And I'm, obviously, was excited to speak to it. It's been a while since I thought about this at the beginning, and just reflecting, it feels like we've been doing this for a while, but it really wasn't that long ago, but we've come so far in our knowledge of understanding the pandemic and what's going on. The election on Tuesday: lots of big stuff happening! So I feel like we covered our bases and you asked me all kinds of questions and I really appreciated being a part of this and I'm happy that other educators are being interviewed to talk about their experience with it.

CONOR 01:15:46: Thank you so much, Jolene, for your time and for being willing to do that. I'll stop recording now. And I really appreciate your time.

JOLENE 01:15:53: Yeah, you're welcome!